

The Iowa Dispositions Model: A Framework for Developing Effective Teacher Dispositions

BACKGROUND:

In the past, learning, teaching, and assessing dispositions has been problematic in many teacher preparation programs because of the nebulous nature of those characteristics that complement knowledge and skills. For the past two years a fourteen-member Dispositions Team established by the Teacher Quality Enhancement initiatives in Iowa has worked to develop a framework for defining and assessing dispositions. The goals of the team were to study current research in the field, to articulate and define concrete, specific dispositions, and to present the resulting document as an instrument for TEPs.

The framework is based on four areas of reflection: Caring, Communicative, Creative, and Critical. A fifth set includes professional requirements mandated by the Iowa Code of Ethics and the Iowa Department of Education. An added "Contextual" disposition section suggests qualities that might be part of a mission statement for one or more schools, e.g., an emphasis on spiritual growth in a faith-based institution.

We invite you to examine the enclosed document and the suggestions for its use. Its purpose is not to judge students nor to eliminate them from a program, but rather to encourage reflection and growth. Our vision for this document is that it will act as a catalyst to encourage each education preparation program to adapt those qualities that support its own mission statement and honor its uniqueness. In an age of mandates, checklists, and test preparations, we hope that reflecting on dispositions can help us retain a vision of education as a process for realizing our human potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ITS USE:

- to provide a vehicle/vocabulary to allow us to address those previously elusive areas of human behavior
- to assist students in becoming reflective practitioners, especially if used from the earliest stages of teacher preparation
- to provide a structure to witness how dispositions impact student learning
- to enrich teacher preparation by clearly articulating vague characteristics, making them more manageable subjects of reflection
- to launch research projects
- to encourage the examination of personal qualities as they apply generally to our lives
- to compare these traits to those in other helping professions (counseling, nursing, etc.)
- to identify areas of strength and needed growth in human relations and classroom performance
- to begin discussion in a non-threatening way between student teachers and cooperating teachers or administrators
- to provide language for examining, emphasizing, changing, or eliminating characteristics of a program
- to present high school students with specific qualities of educators to suggest career possibilities
- to encourage discussion among campus faculty/staff

CAUTIONS FOR ITS USE:

- Although the document is flexible and has many possible uses, teachers should be cautious to use it to facilitate growth, not to "catch" someone failing to measure up.
- The framework is meant to encourage reflection, not as a "hoop" or gatekeeper.
- The framework works best when introduced in the early stages of teacher preparation; it should not be "sprung" on a student at the end of training.
- The sections of the document are designed to work in concert with each other and lose their power if a whole section is eliminated.
- The spirit of the document is one of support and encouragement of personal and professional growth, a means of staying in touch with those traits that separate us from teaching machines.

FEEDBACK:

The ongoing process of reflecting on dispositions is essential not only for students and teachers, but for departments and institutions. Exchanging responses to our experiences can facilitate the process and enrich our statewide conversation. We invite you to contact our website at www.iowacte.org to take an active part in this exciting work:

- explain ways your institution or TEP has incorporated the framework
- give feedback from students, teachers, and administrators
- document discussions and assignments that result from using the framework
- ask questions